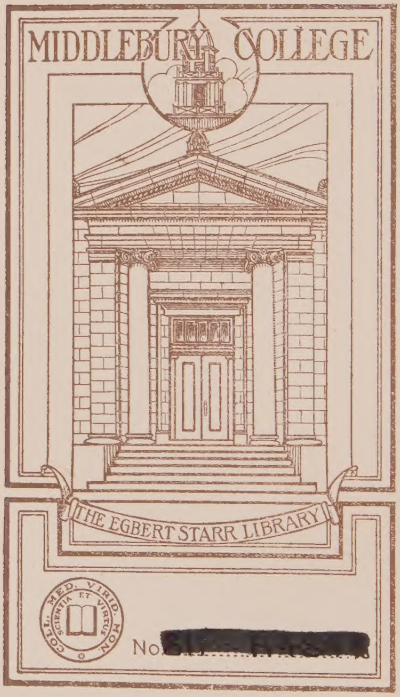
Roy Helton

LONESOME WATER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LONESOME WATER

Poems by *Roy Helton*

WITH DRAWINGS BY THE AUTHOR

Harper & Brothers Publishers
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FIRST EDITION

I-E

To

A. W. H.

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Acknowledgment is due to the *Bookman*, the *Forum* and the *Nation* for permission to print poems first published in those magazines.

Foreword

The poems in the first section of this book are written in the English of the remoter regions of the Big Sandy Valley of Kentucky.

A few words may trouble the reader. Sang in Lonesome Water is the mountain name for gin seng. Curiously enough it more correctly reproduces the sound of the Chinese original than our standard English word.

Battling by the trace means washing clothes by the path. The damp clothes are laid on a stump and are beaten with a battling stick.

Briggoty men are headstrong men. A few lines in the poem with this title are quotations from the notebook of a pioneer.

Old Christmas is the Christmas of the unreformed calendar. In regions distant from the railroad it is still a holy day.

No attempt has been made to standardize this local speech, but rather to suggest its variety with the least possible number of mountain words.

Lonesome Water

Lonesome Water

By Roy Helton

Lonesome Water.

DRANK lonesome water:
Weren't but a tad then
Up in a laurel thick
Digging for sang;
Came on a place where
The stones was holler;
Something below them
Tinkled and rang.

Dug where I heard it
Drippling below me:
Should a knowed better,
Should a been wise;
Leant down and drank it,
Clutching and gripping
The overhung cliv
With the ferns in my eyes.

LONESOME WATER

Tweren't no tame water
I knowed in a minute;
Must a been laying there
Projecting round
Since winter went home;
Must a laid like a cushion,
Where the feet of the blossoms
Was tucked in the ground.

Tasted of heart leaf,
And that smells the sweetest,
Paw paw and spice bush
And wild briar rose;
Must a been counting
The heels of the spruce pines,
And neighboring round
Where angelica grows.

I'd drunk lonesome water,
I knowed in a minute:
Never larnt nothing
From then till today;
Nothing worth larning,
Nothing worth knowing.
I'm bound to the hills
And I can't get away.

R H

Mean sort of dried up old
Groundhoggy feller,
Laying out cold here
Watching the sky;
Pore as a hipporwill,
Bent like a grass blade;
Counting up stars
Till they count too high.

I know where the grey foxes
Uses up yander,
Know what'll cure ye
Of ptisic or chills,
But I never been way from here,
Never got going:
I've drunk lonesome water.
I'm bound to the hills.

Ballad of the Jewshorn.

PLAYING on a jewshorn
Tromping down the holler,
Who'd I meet but Vada Allen
Battling by the trace;
Pink like little oak leaves
Out of breath from growing
Where the spruce pine shadows
Fell around her face.

Hair just the color of a
June bug's belly,
Eyes like a fish pool
Floating full of May;
Pretty as a picture.
Bent my face and kissed her.
"When you coming courting?"
"Mighty soon and gay."

"Where you going now, Joe?"
"Off to see the country:
Pretty soon we'll marry,
Then I got to bide;
But I hain't seed a train yet,

R.H

I hain't seed a hanging;
And narrow lays our valley,
But the world is wide."

Playing on a jewshorn
Up and down Kentucky;
Now I've seed a hanging,
Now I've glimpsed a train;
Seed the whole creation.
"Have you seed a city?"
"Never seed a city."
Tromping on again.

Playing on a jewshorn
Up and down the pavings,
Seed a mighty city,
Chimley peaks and dome.
Seed the whole creation.
"Have you seed a woman's heart?"
"Never seed a woman's heart."
Tromping weary home.

Playing on a jewshorn
Creeping up the valley,
Who'd I meet but Vada Allen
Leaning to a cane:

Hair was white as snow banks
Drifting in December,
Laying out and waiting
For the April rain.

"Where you been so long, Joe?"
"Tromping all creation."
"Tell me bout it, honey,—
Tell me all you found
While the wind roams up above us
Through the laurels and the alders,
And the rain comes sweet with ivy
To our bed room in the ground."

Eve of May.

OH THE moon was ridin higher
Than the steeples of the poplars,
And the evenin it was Sunday,
But tomorrow would be May,
When I ranted down to Sandy
From a skyvee in the mountains
And I bruk the Fourth Commandment
And I sung my soul away.

Oh I sent a shaft of singin
Round the tiltin varge of April,
I shook the livin timbers
And I heared the echoes roll;
I gathered all the winter
In a poke of heathen music
And ranted on regardless
Of the damage to my soul.

I sang of Pretty Polly
And I sang of Barby Ellen,
And "I've drownded six kings' daughters
And the seventh you shall be."
"Thar lies my blue eyed Ella."

And "I'm huntin Willie Taylor."
And "A pity sech a rogue as you
A naked gal should see."

But agen I reached the narrers
Whar the clives is browed with laurel,
(Oh the evenin it was Sunday
When I sung my soul away.)
A woman with a dulcimore
Come weavin through the shadows,
"Oh if you're out fer singin, Joe—"
Her eyes war bold and gay.

"Oh if you're out fer singin, Joe,
And careless of salvation,—"
(A woman in a scarlet gown
And braids of yaller hair.)
"Jest light and shake the hills with me."
She raised her slender fingers
And stroked across her dulcimore
A wild and windy air.

And Beaver! she was dainty,
And Beaver! she was handsome;
Her skin was soft as blossoms
And her lips was hot as June;

She flung aside her scarlet gown
And rippled in the moonlight;
The joy bugs on the locusts
And the night winds war her tune.

Oh I knowed she was a witch gal,
But I knowed too late to matter;
I knowed I'd lost salvation,
But I knowed too late to care:
I wished I was the night wind
With its arms around her shoulders;
I wished I was the moonlight
With its fingers through her hair.

She led me up the hillside
By a trace I'd never travelled,
She braided up some blossoms
Fer a pretty round my head,
She called, "Oh you're the man fer me
And we shall play together
A dizzy, dancin tune tonight
To wake the dreamin dead."

Oh, she set the moon to jiggin
On the steeples of the poplars,
And Beaver! That was music

And the wildness wailed and grew;
And stars commenced to caper
On the scruff of Thankless Mountain,
And blossoms twistin off their leaves
To sail across the dew.

I heared a raincrow in the brush
I heared a moanful hipporwill,
I heared the swing of axe blades
And the crashin death of trees,
I heared the chuckle of a churn,
I heared a whipsaw sighin
And the wailin of a yarn wheel
And the mumble of the bees.

And gals in linsey petticoats,
And gals in prints and calico,
Come dancin through the moonlight,
And starn and jealous men
In coonskins and wamuses,
Singin to the dulcimore,
"It's springtime in Kentucky
And we've come alive again."

Singin to the measure
Of her old time longsome music,

When sudden, from the bottoms
Come a clashin in the cane,
And I heared a Shawnee war whoop,
I heared the plang of bow strings,
And arrows slantin through the trees
Like drifts of winter rain.

I saw the flash of scalpin knives—
"Oh, change yer tune, my lady.
Oh, play me up a song of love
And wind me in yer hair;
Fer I'm feared of the old songs
And the old time faces.
Oh, play me up a new song,
A wild and windy air."

She played me up a new song;
She rung the hills with madness,
And a storm of fashty ladies
Came a rompin to the moon,
(Oh the slim and likely young uns
That came sportin up the meadows,
And the plumb, dead lovely music
When they jined in the tune.)

Then I laid my arms around her,
And her skin was soft as blossoms,
(I knowed she war a witch gal,
But I knowed too late to care.)
And I lowed I war the night wind
With my hands across her shoulders,
And I lowed I war the moonlight
With my fingers in her hair.

And she held her lips to kiss me,
But her lips grew bleak as winter;
She reached her arms to hold me,
But her hands come white as foam,
And I saw the flame of daydawn
In the east beyand the mountains,
And the earth war tramblin under
As the dead went marchin home.

"Too late, too late fer lovin—"
Her voice frailed off to silence;
But meltin in the dawnlight
One last faint word she said,
"Oh I will be yer lover,
Oh, I will be yer lover,
Oh I will be yer lover
In the lonesome of the dead."

A field of trompen blossoms;
A mist acrost the valley;
(Oh the evening it was Sunday
When I sung my soul away.)
And the hill was bare and gauntsome,
And gauntsome war the shadows;
The sky above the poplar tops
Was empty with the day.

Oh I knowed she war a witch gal,
But I knowed too late to matter;
I knowed I'd lost salvation,
But I knowed too late to care,
When I memorized the words she whispered
Slipping off to silence,
And that plumb, dead lovely music
And the moonlight on her hair.

Fox Race.

THAT'S a squitch owl in the valley
Hain't it honey?"
"Maybe, Lurey."
"Hark to him!

And I hear some hounds yan side of
Grassy Meadows
In the bottoms.
Listen, Jim."

"Fox race, honey." "Who'd be bouncin
Just at harvest?"
"Maybe Taulbe
Wants some fun."

"You're a sweatin' Jim." "I reckoned
I'd be late to
See you, honey.
Had to run.

Never saw the night so black or
Felt the dark

Crawl up the
Hills so cold:"

"Stars are stickin out the sky like
Spikes half drove
With heads of
Splintered gold."

"Such a little chance for lovin
And you Blantons
And us Carters
Hates so long."

"Maybe cause the hates it tore through
That the love
Between us growed
So deep and strong.

What's this wetness down your arm, Jim?"
"Wadin Greasy
Creek at
Double tide

Stumbled on a dornick stone, the
Water splashed

My shirt and
Wet my side."

"That's a night hawk high up yander like
A critter of
Another world
Than ours."

"It's a sign of—" "What's that sprinkled
On my hair and
Cheek then, Jimmy?"
"August showers."

"'Nother gain I hear the hounds a
Bayin back of
Hencliff."
"Likely you do."

"Someone else is bouncin' foxes. Who'd
It be out
Thar tonight?"
"I wonder who."

"Listen Jimmy! Hark to that deep
Bayin like a

RH

Rumble through
The ground.

Reckon could be that's Old True now?"
"Sure it is
Old True."
"Milt Blanton's hound?

What's old sheriff Blanton headin
Up this way
Tonight for?"
"Me I suppose.

Claimed that he could fetch me in
Alive or dead
By daydawn:
I reckon he knows."

"And Cade's down yander. I hear his Nancy
And Tager."
"Yes Cade
And his gun:

I kilt a man in the Oil Well
Holler, Lurey.

I don't aim
To run.

That's your night hawk hoverin over us,
Homin
To another world
Than this.

It's a sign of death." "What's that brushed cross
My lips then?"
"Your man's
Last kiss."

"What is this wetness over your shirt, Jim?"
"Wadin' Greasy
Hip high
At the flood ——"

"It tain't like water." "Well no, it
Hain't, dear.
It's mine and
Your Pappy's blood."

Old Christmas.

WHERE you coming from, Lomey Carter,
So early over the snow?
What's them pretties you got in your hand,
And where you aiming to go?

Step in, Honey. Old Christmas morning
We hain't got nothing much;
Maybe a bite of sweetness and corn bread,
A little ham meat and such.

But come in, Lomey. Sally Ann Barton's
Hungering after your face.
Wait till I light my candle up.
Set down. There's your old place.

Where you been, so early this morning?"
"Grave yard, Sally Ann:
Up by the trace in the Salt Lick meadow
Where Taulbe kilt my man."

"Taulbe hain't to home this morning.
Wisht I could scratch me a light:

Dampness gits in the heads of the matches;
I'll blow up the embers bright."

"Needn't trouble. I won't be stopping:
Going a long ways still."
"You didn't see nothing, Lomey Carter,
Up on the grave yard hill?"

"What should I see there, Sally Ann Barton?"
"Spirits walk loose last night."
"There was an elder bush a blooming
While the moon still give some light."

"Yes, elder bushes they bloom, Old Christmas,
And critters kneel down in their straw.
Anything else? Up in the graveyard?"
"One thing more I saw:

I saw my man with his head all bleeding
Where Taulbe's shot went through."
"What did he say?" "He stooped and kissed me."
"What did he say to you?"

"Said Lord Jesus forgive your Taulbe;
But he told me, another word;

RH

Said it soft when he stooped and kissed me;
That was the last I heard."

"Taulbe hain't come home this morning."
"I know that, Sally Ann,
For I kilt him, coming down through the meadow
Where Taulbe kilt my man.

I met him up on the meadow trace
When the moon was fainting fast;
I had my dead man's rifle gun,
And kilt him as he come past."

"I heard two shots." "'Twas his was second:
He got me 'fore he died.
You'll find us at daybreak, Sally Ann Barton:
I'm laying there dead at his side."

Four Nights of Loving.

THE first night of loving
Joe Hilier gave to me
The big eyes, for all night long
I laid awake and heard a song:
In my heart I heard a song
Like wind, when the wind blows strong
Through the leaves of a wahoo tree.
(*Are you pledged to Black Bill Dalton?*
He's naught but dirt to me.)

The second night of loving
Joe Hilier gave to me
A golden pin with a stone in its head,
A costly stone that sparkled red,
Like your red lips, Joe Hilier said:
I held them up. He bent his head
To see, to see, to see.
(*What's that under your window*
Restlessing around?
It's the wind, Honey; naught but the wind
Tromping the dry leaves down.)

R.H.

The third night of loving
The candle light was dim;
And he hugged my neck,
Till he smothered my breath
And I gave Joe Hilier my love till death;
I gave my love to him.
(Sit down and bide awhile, love,
And kiss my lips again.
The wind tromped over the leaves
Like the feet of men.)

The fourth night of loving
Softly Joe Hilier came:
His footstep like a shadow;
He whispered at my name.
He stood before the candle:
Red through his breast it shown;
"Oh think no more of me, gal,
Nor the pin with the blood red stone,
For I ate my wedding supper
Under the ground alone.
I ate my infare supper
In Hell before I came."
And he faded like the lamplight
When the wind eats up its flame.
(And some one under the window
Laughed and named my name.)

Briggoty Men.

OLD John Swift came riding to the mountains,
Riding with his saddle bags stuffed with silver bars,
Past the Little Shades of Death, riding to Big Sandy,
Facing through the darkness in a wilderness of stars.

"Briggoty gals, don't ye want to cross the Cumberlands?
Briggoty gals, hain't ye got the love to roam?"
"Briggoty man, don't ye want to raise no young uns?
Briggoty man, don't ye hanker fer a home?"

Marching, marching, marching to Kentucky,
Marching into Canaan on the heels of Daniel Boone,
Briggoty men with your rifles and your powder gourds,
Briggoty men, with your snatch of gospel tune.

"Lodge this night on the Laurel Fork of Holston.
Drake bakes bread without washing his hands.
Horse got scared, made a turrabel flustration,
Rammed against a sapling and bust his saddle bands.

Travel down the Cumberland through some turrabel
cainbrakes;
The wind blowz bitter in a rainy dawn;

Climbed a grait mountain, saw the track of Indiens,
And some turns back, but we goes on."

Briggoty men, tramping to Kentucky,
Down the roaring Breaks of Sandy where the cliffs are pink with June,
Briggoty men, marching to Kentucky,
To a dark and bloody Canaan on the heels of Daniel Boone.

"Oh it's young uns makes a woman, but yearnin makes a man;
The seeds were planted in his blood the day when time began;
He can't take root and ever be young again,
Fer peace it is the pizen vine that chokes the souls of men."

Marching, tramping, trailing to Kentucky,
Marching out of Egypt where the wild cats wail,
Marching on to freedom from the fences and the pavements,
Marching to Kentucky down the Wilderness Trail.

"Briggoty man, here's a bottom whar the cane grows,
Briggoty man, yan's a clarin and a spring."

"Briggoty gal, ye kin light from off yer jack, while
I fetch out my broad axe and make the timbers ring.

I'm old now, I'm done now with trompin toward the sundown.
We'll settle on Levisy where the clives are pink with June;
So light down and sing me a lonesome on your dulcimore.
Light down and play me an everlastin tune."

Little More West.

HATE to be dependin,
Hate to be beholdin,
Gals all pitchin
Because I live alone;
Little more west
Somewheres in the Ozarks
Fore I turn to dirt and
Settle like a stone.

Give me a rifle, a cow
And some biddies—
Boy, I'd shake the timbers
Way I'd aim to sing;
Boy, I'd harry under;
Boy, I'd ride the thunder
For one more go to
Wrastle with the spring.

Hain't beat yet though
I'm broke and creaky:
Little more west when
I sink in the loam:
One more chance to

Heave against the winter
And a little more west 'fore
I have to go home.

Takin out a lease on the
Stars behind the sunset;
Takin out a patent on a
Scope of windy sky:
Give me a rifle, a froe
And a broad axe,
And a little more west, 'fore
I settle down to die.

Old Men and Old Trees.

PRIME fond of tall trees
Old trees and knotty;
Prime fond of old men
That walked a windy way:

Birds can come and
Summer in their branches;
Old men and old trees
Don't scare the flocks away.

Must have sucked the sweetness up,
Old and wrung and knotted,
When the violets faded into
Honey mixed with tears;

Took a many nip of stronger
Drink than milk or water
For old men and old trees
To stagger up the years.

Applying the Blossoms.

UP IN the graveyard
'Plyin the blossoms
In the cool September when
The summer heat has run:
Got a bunch of roses
And pop eyed susans
And a tuft of high geraniums
That dry handsome in the sun.

Here's a sprig of spagnard
For your bosom, Mamie.
Took away my right man and
Harried him to hell.
Lillies in the valley
For a comfort Mamie,
Need a mite of coolin scent
Down yander where you dwell.

Clover at your feet
To mind you of the meadows,
And heartleaf to smell to
Over top your head;
Sinkfield and vilets

And princes' feathers,
And life everlastin
For the dreamin dead.

Here's a reef of laurel
Poor Joe Prater:
Told me that ye loved me
But ye hankered after fame;
Stole an August haystack on a
Borrered wagon
And then got horse kicked
And never were the same.

Clover at your feet
To mind you of the meadows,
And heartleaf to smell to
Over top your head;
Sinkfield and vilets
And princes' feathers,
And life everlastin
For the dreamin dead.

Brought a branch of pawpaw,
Member how you liked it,
Can't seem to reckon
Jemmy Taylor's gone so soon;

Tried all the signs and they
Never seemed to harm you,
Thought you bore a witch mark,
Thought you'd shot the moon:
Went to bed a singin and that's
Kilt a heap of people,
Numbered out a hundred stars
One night and took no hurt,
Whistled in a coal mine and
Kissed me hind my ear once,
Brought a hoe inside the house
And wore a dead man's shirt.

Clover at your feet
To mind you of the meadows
Heartleaf to smell to
Over top your head;
Sinkfield and vilets
And princes' feathers,
And life everlastin
For the dreamin dead.

Here's a tuft of pansies
For your button, Clancy,
You that was a pretty man and
Had to have your way;

R H

Never took nothin but
Yes from a woman,
And yes so mortal easy
For a gal like me to say.
Hopin you've forgotten why
You went to hell together;
Hopin Jemmy Taylor's got
Your knife from out his breast;
Hopin down in hell that
Your neck is straight and handsome;
And I'm hopin you'll be pleasant
When I'm old and laid to rest.

Clover at your feet
To mind you of the meadows,
Heartleaf to smell to
Over top your head;
Sinkfield and vilets
And princes' feathers,
And life everlastin
For the dreamin dead.

Plain Things.

PLAIN things, poor things
All I'm fixed to promise;
Things that's growed by summer sun
Or butchered from a tree."
"Hain't you just some shammy gloves
To draw around my fingers,
Just a pair of crimson hose
To tighten round my knee?
Just a brought on shally dress
To wear to Christmas frolics,
Just a yaller bonnet with a
Feather to her head?"

"Pawpaw when it's black and tart
I'll aim to fotch a plenty;
Mats of blossoms in the spring
And corn for gritted bread;
A right nag, a prancy,
A good un fer your saddle
And a man on the tother
Till the both of us is dead."

"Hain't you any ballet song
You know to sing of twilights,
Any fancy words to make
A glamor in the west?"

"Naught but the night wind
Croonin in the laurels,
And a bold spring churnin,
And a young un at your breast.
Plain things, poor things,
All I'm fixed to give you:
'Tain't 'nough."

"Plenty,
And I'll have you as you are,
If you'll pillow my head
With a mat of yellow blossoms
Where in between the willows
Comes the flutter of a star;
If you'll make me a soft bed
Underneath a chestnut
Where the wind comes dronin
So I'll dream I hear the sea,—
If you'll give me a bold spring
And a proud hill over,
And if you're mortal certain
'Bout a young un for my knee."

Cold Morning.

WAKE up, gal. It's half past three."
"I'm gitting dressed."

White nags prancing down Shiftless Hill;
A moon in the west.

Little baby pressing his lips to the
Tip of her breast.

Courting and living hain't one picture, but
Living's the best.

Little baby. That's all 's come true.
Forgit the rest.

"Rouse up, gal. It's half past three."
"I'm gitting dressed."

Way from Here.

SAYS, "Folks allow
The world is round and spinning,
'Way from here."
Says, "Frolicking and dance
Hain't heavy sinning
And eggs and meal is dear."
Jim Williams says "They
Got cold, sullen hearts,
And gals wear fotched on
Clothes in foreign parts."
Ashland and Baltimore, he seen.
Says, "'Tain't much different
Else. The trees is green
Way from here, same as on Big Sandy."

Young uns has got to
Have their pap, whatever,
'Way from here
Same as over home.
I reckon mules hain't
Less contrarious, and
Milk cows yander is
Just as fond to roam.

Where cows are, women's
Got to lead the cows in,
Wade flood water, and
'Tween times chop and sew,
Feed their biddies and
Build the kitchen fire,—
Might have guessed it must be,
But it's good to know
Way from here 's the same as on Big Sandy.

Off in towered cities,
Wearing gold and linen,
(Kind of sets my
Weaving spirit free)
Thinking 'bout the foreign
Gals in lace and jewels
Fotching home their critters
Tonight the same as me:
Way from here, same as on Big Sandy.

Testimony.

STRUCK ile last summer;
Made a heap of money,
Made a thousand dollars
From a biling well
Went to the city to
See how I liked it—
Found twarn't noways
Different from Hell.

Hands got hungry
Fer a helve and a bridle,
Things all polished—
Nothing thar to rust;
Lips got thirsty fer a
Cup of lasty water,
Feet fer the feel of the
Meadows and the dust.

Dinging and toot horns,
Everlasting blowings,
Men that ran on errands, gals that
Answered to a bell.

Nothing to do.
Twas all done fer ye:
Found twarn't noways
Different from Hell.

Waiting.

SOMETHING down to the spring, Leidy;
I felt it there
Just as I bent my back to dip.
Come a press on my hair."

"What were it, Killis?" "And something cool
Brushing my face."
"Tonight is dark." "But the stars are out
All over the place."

"What did you see? Don't stand there gloaming."
"Nothing much,
Scarcely more than a streak of light
And a rabbit's touch:

Just as I dipped, there by the cope stone
Over the spring,
Spindly and nar' like a little crutch,—
That was the thing."

"Lift up my head, man. Didn't you know him?
What did he say,

Waiting there by the spring to hobble
And show me the way?

Any sound?" "Faint like a gurgle
Of laughter I heard
What was maybe the water drippling,
Maybe a bird."

"I'd a heard better. Hand down that shawl. Old
Hands gitting numb;
And quick plait my hair in the old time way,
So's he'll know when I come."

Under Old Kentucky.

THE bars has fled the timbers,
The trees is mean and thin:
No friends now in the moonlight
For the wild fox was my kin,—
Oh dig a grave in the last lone hill
To lay my body in.

On a lone hill whar the dove mates
And the poplar climbs to gold,
And watch thar's nothin under
That's ever bought or sold.

Or when the wind is flittin leaves,
Or stars has strown the sky,
Oh bed me on a tall hill
When I lay down to die.

Or in the dewy daydawn,
Or when the boughs are bare,
But drop a heartleaf on my mouth,
And ivy to my hair.

Deep under old Kentucky;
Never a rod to roam,

But grow a spice bush to my feet
And let the smell of spring come sweet
And let me feel the summer heat;
So I can dream of home.

Witch Woman.

SHE was a stranger to our parts;
A mighty pretty woman out of Breathitt
With white cheeks,
And fond of frolicking;
And he was a hard shelled Baptist.

There was a lot of talk
What she was doing hereabouts,
Not coming to meeting,
Nor earning her keep.

People kept inquisiting
Until she married Bill:
He was plumb bigeyed thinking about her,
The way she laughed and sang.

She wore a string of silver beads
Around her neck on her marriage day.

Her name was Sheilah.

Second night they was married
She said,

"There's a dance up at Nailor's on Rock House Branch.
Take me there."
Bill said,
"Got to get up plumb early tomorrow
Count of helping Jim Wills's house raising;
And there's a pair of shoes I'm making
Is promised tomorrow day sure.
I can't take you, Honey."

She got sullen then:
Just sat by the window
Looking out up the road;
Never baked any corn pone, nor
Milked the critter, nor
Hauled in the water, even,
From the well down the hollow;
Just sat sullen by the window
Looking out up the road.

Second week they were married
She said,
"There's a frolicking up to Sadie Hillier's
Just past where Painter's Lick
Makes that elbow doubling.
Take me there."
Bill said,

TH

"Got to help Jose Carberry
Get his spring pole rigged
Tomorrow at daydawn.
I promised it.
I can't take you, Honey."

She got briggoty then:
Just sat on a rock chair
Out front of the cooking house
Looking up over the hill.
Never darnt Bill's socks was wore into lace work
Heel and toe;
Never got the bread into the pan, nor
Brought in fire wood for the step stove, nor
Even laid out knives and plates for supper;
Just sat rocking in her rock chair
Out front of the cooking house
Looking up over the hill.

Long about ten, by clock time
Bill came in from top of Baldy
Where he'd been hearkening to a fox race;
Opened the door and called out, "Sheilah!"
But Sheilah weren't there,
Wake or sleeping:
Sheilah was cleared away.

First, Bill reckoned
She was rid to the frolicking;
Then he seen
Her fancy clothes was still a hanging
On the spool by the door back,
And her spurs was down by the stove.
And then he seen
That his rifle gun was gone from the fireboard,
And his powder horn was gone from the rack.

Went outside and looked about,
But nary sign of Sheilah.
And he called,
But nary word came back.

A while he stood there studying,
Till the moon glow ris up
Over yan side Barney,
And fur off, up at the chine of the clives
Where the trees were wind killed
And gone to naught,
The moon came raring broad as jedgment,
And there against the moon
Stood a woman
With a rifle gun helt in her hand.
Bill called out, "Sheilah!"

But Sheilah never answered;
Unless it was answering when she
Seemed to pull at her neck like
Where the silver beads were,
And lifted the rifle gun
And fired up into the moon.

Bill went down through the cane
And he waded half side deep
Across the tide of Barney,
And clumb up the clives
Where the trees were wind killed
And gone to naught;
And he called out, "Sheilah!"
But Sheilah never answered,
Unless it was answering
When, far up at the top head of Troublesome,
A rifle gun coughed again
And the flash fire pointed toward the moon.

Twelve miles over coves and hills;
Twelve miles heading home again.
Cast open the door
And there lay Sheilah sleeping,
The rifle gun hanging on the fireboard,
The powder horn laying on the rack,

But the string of silver beads
Clean gone from round her neck;
And her hands was clinched like claws.

Next day Bill went
See Uncle Zeb Kildare,
Told him his trouble,
And asked him what was best.
When he came home,
Out in the truck patch,
Laying down flat, with her breast on the grass,
Was Sheilah, singing
And nibbling the heads of the clover.

Bill said,
"Sheilah! Sheilah!
There's a dancing party
Up to Lijah Beesom's
With three fiddlers tonight.
Let's go there."

She said,
"Got a heap of clothes to battle
Down in Barney,
Daydawn tomorrow,
And some roasting ears

That's ripe for gritting; so's you'll have some bread.
Can't go, Honey," said Sheilah.

All day through she stood a working
Like a right woman, milked the critters,
Mended her loom for a coverlet weaving,—
Along came dark she went to bed.

On past nine by clock time
Bill came in from busher meeting,
Opened the door and called out, "Sheilah!"
And saw the empty bed.

Went out again. Wet clouds were running,
And nary sign of Sheilah.
Called and peered and called again,
But nary word came back.

Prayed a spell and then
Did what Zeb told him 'd
Clear witchcraft from a woman;
Rubbed garlic round the threshold
And varvain on the latch;
Then sat and waited, wrastling
The Devil for Sheilah's soul.

Along towards midnight
With the wet wind raring,
And the old house creaking in the joints,
Came something whickering,
Whindling and whickering
In the black outside Bill's doör;
And sniffed awhile
And went away again.
The hound dog by the fire
Scrouched and moaned,
While Bill stood hearkening;
And the wet wind trambled
Up through the puncheon floor.

But over top of the storm grunt
Something came whickering,
Whindling and whickering,
In the black outside Bill's door.

Bill was a stern man:
Lifted the door latch
Till the wind came wuthering in,
And the chimley lamp went
Flickery and blue.

Then, all of a dash,
Something white like a rabbit beast

Jumped in,
And the lamp went out,
And the door flung to.

Out of the blackness,
Over the storm grunt,
Something lay whickering,
Whindling and whickering,
Down on the puncheon floor.

Then the hound dog growled and leapt;
And Bill's knees gave,
And thumped him to the floor
And a noise came
Over again the door.
Like water dripping from a leaky cup.

Step by step
Bill crawled to the fire
Was glowing red and dim,
And bellowsed it up.

But when he looked behind him,
There on the log splits,—
Lay Sheilah
With the hound dog tearing at her throat.

The Song of Dark Waters.

I'S DE nigger; I's de nigger,
I's de nigger makes de works go round:
I's pushin, I's haulin
Wherever dere's a shovel in de ground.
You couldn't lif de garbage in de ole slop cart
Withouten men lak me;
Couldn't run a vessel on de lakes or rivers,
Couldn't lanch a steamer on de sea.
I's a dirt and a black and a filth and a grime;
I's a sweatin and a laughin and a gruntin all de time,
And dat's my way to be:

I's de nigger;
I's de nigger,
I's de nigger in de woodpile of de world.

Up dare in Heaven where de Lord am living,
  Who laid dem streets of pearl?
De angels all been ladies; de postles all been gents;
Just set and sing and twiddle dare wing,
  And live at de Lord's expense.
Who raise dem walls of Shiloh?
Who pave dem streets of pearl?

Some old nigger,
Some poor old nigger,
Old nigger from de woodpile of de world.

Pizen in the Ground.

WATERMELLON makes a nest of leaves;
Coon he roost on high;
Chicken cluck on de good brown muck;
Birds trapse up de sky;
Splashing berries sips de sun;
Blossoms jigs around:
Up top de place
Where de heart find grace,
But pizen,
But pizen,
But pizen's in de ground.

Dark live under and so do de snake;
Sunlight bounce on de grass;
Corn is better dan beets and turnips
Grow deep where de shadows pass.
Iron am cold like a sleepin' toad;
Gold in de hills am found,
But metal ain't sweet
To de good hot meat—
And pizen,
And pizen,
And pizen's in de ground.

Bird and angel all got wings—
Never dig nor plow;
Up yander blossom growin' thick
And squirrel on de bough.
Warn't for de dark and down below
Folks all be sleepin sound:
Shovel and spade
For de devil's trade
And pizen,
And pizen,
And pizen in de ground.

Dust to Dust.

(A negro fantasy.)

A MAN he loves de good old dirt;
He likes to lay on de ground,
Watch de bumble bees a boozing on de blossoms
And hear dat droning sound.

And on an on nine thousand year,
If dey warn't no folks but men,
Dey'd set and laze whar de sunlight blaze
And sleep till de clock struck ten.

Now de good Lord loved old Adam
Dat chuckle while he doze
But de good Lord vented women,
And de women vented clothes.

Den de Devil make some yaller soap,
Roll it smooth and round:
"Look here, Eva! Look here Eva!
At de apple I done found.

Dip it in de River Frastus;
Rub it in you han'."

She done so; and de lather rose,—
It bleach her skin and her fig leaf clothes,—
And dat were de doom of Man.

"Adam and Eve! Get out dis garden!
Out!" de good Lord sayed.
"If you don't like dirt, den you don't like Heaven:
You'se a mocking all I made.

For Eve she come right sweet and clean
Out of a piece of bone,
But I snatch old Adam, I lift old Adam
Up from de dirt alone."

Den de banjo strings stop tinkling
And de songs make a moanful sound.
Go way Lady! You clean up Lady
Done twisten my world around.

Set last night and listen
Where de town roar past my street.
And de big machines go grinding
And de pore men scrape dare feet:

Old Adam's hands dey tramble,
Old Adam's knees dey sags

Gitting clothes for women, while de no count women
Keeps scrubbing dare clothes to rags.

And de banjo strings all rusted,
And de dance gone out men's feet,
For de clean up women done stew old Adam,
Done soap old Adam, done slosh old Adam,
Till dey hain't no more dan a gill of gravy
Left in Old Adam's meat.

Soap by itself, it hain't much harm,
And women is middling gay;
When soap and women done form a team
Dey lathered man's life away:

For Eve she come right sweet and clean
Out of a piece of bone,
But de good Lord raised old Adam
Up from the dirt alone.

Tickle of Spring.

LORDEE! Sunk mighty low:
Look up where de daisies grow;
Inch bug lift his back and preen,
Pears like a rainbow painted green;
Grass above my head so far,
Glow worm shine down like a star.
Lordee! Fell mighty low,—
Lindy push me from her do.

Lordee! Riz mighty high:
Head can hold de earth and sky.
Lordee I sing out loud:
Face it stobs de foaming cloud,
Legs dey straddle cross de sea:
World done grow too small for me.
Dip my shovel like a spoon,
Spade de hills; toss de moon.
Mrilla smiling while I sing,—
Lordee! The tickle of spring.

Old Man Blues.

OLD man walking, old man walking,
Old man walking on:
Friends was stepping with me,
Jake he hummed a song,
Beech he danced the Mobile Buck:
Friends all gone.

Mrilla press my shoulder;
Both my tother wives
Singing to de washtub,
Dancing to de clives.

Pegging 'long; tromping 'long:
No place moe to roam:
Friends all gone; gals all gone:
Old man walking home.

"Come in rest awhile sometime,
Watch de chilen play."
Pegging 'long; tromping 'long:
Never time to stay.

"Come in, rest your bones and set."
Old man walking on:

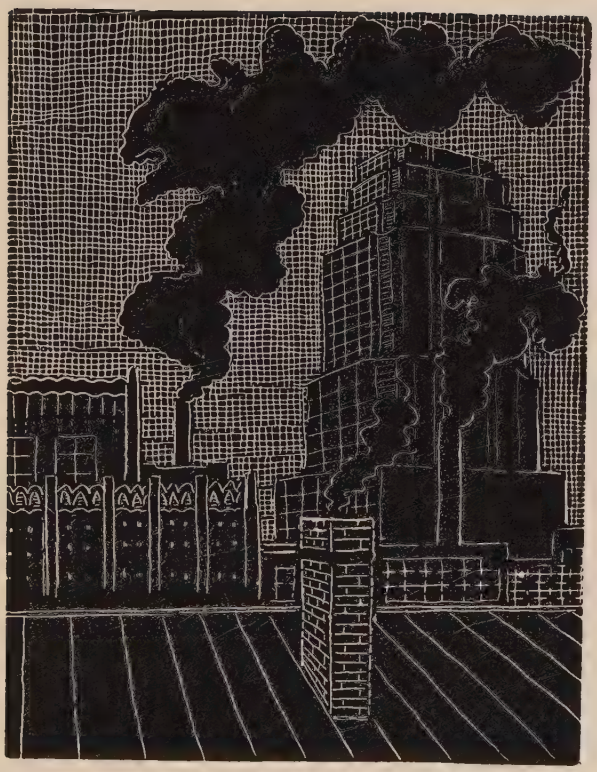
Pretty soon he look around
And de folks and de house is gone.

Front gets close, but can't fetch dar;
No place moe to roam:
Back of me look mighty far,—
Pegging 'long; tromping 'long
Home.

My Land, Your Lover.

SPEAK out through me,
Through me who walk your pavements and your mountains,
While the hot juice of sand and lime and clay
Has built me to a man.
This hundred years or two my blood is yours
And all my fathers' fathers knew and loved you;
My mothers' mothers labored and gave birth
To sons who walked your ways with little ease.
Here, up and down your grand front entrance way,
Between the tide rips and the laureled mountains
I and my kin have wandered all their days
And rooted in your rocks for nourishment.

Speak out through me; a clamor of strange voices
Calls you their own;



Voices of alien twang,
Of London, Paris, Rome;
And in great cities
Caged nightingales sing wooingly of you.
But I am you and you are all of me:

Your meadows where the shattered stars of spring
Dust all green things with splendor;
Your black nights, the wild landscape of your stars;
Your cities' vast machinery; the tender
Sprouts of the week old corn; your soft surrender
Below my tramping feet,
Deep under hemlocks at the close of June,
Where violets pull their chins in and look down;
And in the droning forests of the town
Like shy twin violets, eyes that look toward me
More beautiful than blossoms,—not so cold.
I love your long deep laughs that shake the dust
Out of Time's heart in little flakes of gold;
That also I would sing.
Speak out in me.

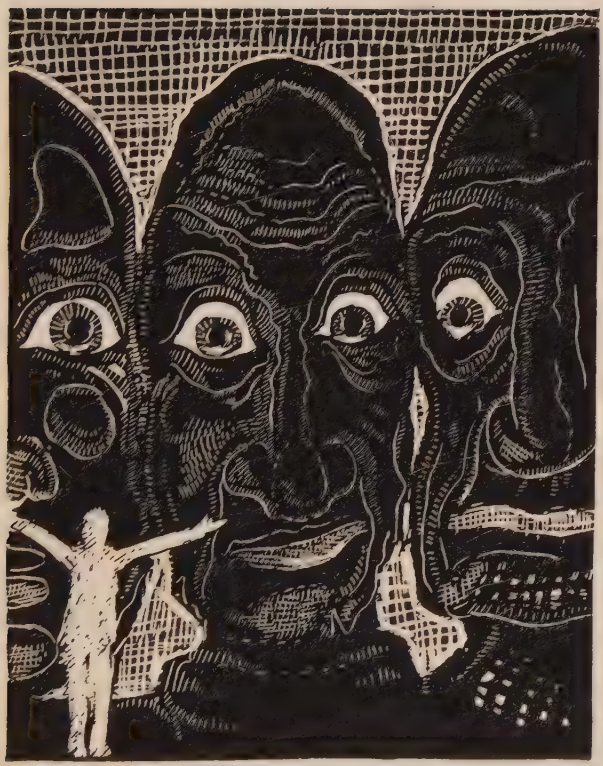
Warm Kentucky noons behind the honeysuckle;
Tinkle of cow bells over the grass patched hills;
Glug of cool water in the swales; birds on the boughs;

LONESOME WATER

Song sweet with heart leaf and spice bush
And sassafras bruised by cows;
Warm Kentucky noons!
On the rough, grey slabs behind the honeysuckle
I drink the cider of your hot pressed hours.

Cool nights of Maine:
Under the keen sword
Of the young July twilight moon
The casual wind chews spruce gum
And lazily falls asleep.
Nights when no birds sing
And the leaves hush like rain—
Oh lady throated birches,
Bend over me the lace work of your bonnets;
Brush back my hair.
Oh black webbed larch,
Tempt me to climb your delicate pavilions.
Oh minarets of spruce,
Call my caged soul to prayer.

Give me a good gift, Life, to welcome me,
Standing bareheaded on your granite pavements
Amid this roar of huge machinery,—
Give a great heartening gift to your long legged son:
No slumber croon to yes, yes, yes my soul



Toward sleepy death, but trouble, cold and hunger,
Thirst and passion. Fence me in
With the locked doors of hearts; so, while I sing,
Wine, wind and women shall not lose their sting;
And madden me with all I cannot know.
The trees are sane, the rocks, the placid dew,
All things that grow seek peace with sun and rain
Save I, your man and lover, come at last
With hands not tender nor considerate
To clutch you to the star hot kiss of song.

South Song.

I'M FOR the South, for the black eyed south
With art in its fingers and love on its mouth,
With scent in the stars of its eyes, and its tune
From Beauty's warm lips on the bride bed of June.

Oh the north folk are grim folk
From Shetland east to Maine:
Brooding, lonely, grim folk,
Plagued with a lust for pain;
So I'm for the clear souled south folk
Of Richmond and Rome and Spain.

Woe is the lot of the north lands,
North of fifty three,
Of the sin eating, blood sweating northlands
That kneel with a knotted knee:
Gorky's dazed folk of the northlands;
Fiona's weird folk of the northlands;
Tolstoi's troubled folk of the northlands,
And Ibsen's dour folk by the sea.

Brooding and bale in the north nights;
Hard strife for the day's short span;

And a grim, grey fate for the souls that mate
Where toil is the measure of man;
Where the great, blonde, grey eyed north folk,
The Berserker, moralist north folk,
Gloom and fume in the starlight,
Hate and mate in the moonlight,
Dream and scheme by the lamplight,
Till the earth runs red with their wars.

So I'm for the south, for the black eyed south,
With art in its fingers and love on its mouth,
With scent in the stars of its eyes, and its tune
From Beauty's warm lips on the bride bed of June.

Ghost?

I WALKED out once by moonlight;
I travelled wide and far;
I saw a little village church
Beneath a great white star.

A child stood by a gate post
And tossed dry leaves at me.
"What is this town you live in?"
"It's Lodi, sir," said she.

"A little town?" "Ten houses.
Next year there may be more.
We have an organ in our church,
And gas lights at the store."

"And stars. Don't leave the stars out."
"Stars are not much to see."
"Yours are so filled with silence
That they creep in to me."

"You're a strange man. You're not a ghost?"
"No dear, no ghost, but I've
Two eyes where stars swarm all night long
Like bees into a hive;

And some day when the skies are dark
And the sun is black all day,
My head will let them out again
To scare the dark away:

Let them pour out like bees, my dear
And fill the skies with light."
"Don't tell me that you're not a ghost!"
"Must you run, dear? Good night."

May Jones of Filbert Street.

MAY JONES of Filbert Street is walking into town;
Dead Czar Nicholas, wailing for your crown;
William, Lord of Brandenburg, chopping cedars down;
Turn heads! Bow heads; Divers of the sea,
Rise from your pearl beds and twist your backs with me!
Bent backs, flayed backs, backs of black and brown,—
May Jones of Filbert Street is walking into town.

Silk worms crawling for her dimpled knees,
China winds that twist the berry trees,
Lillies of the valley, hiding from the bees,
Saving up a drop of gold to kiss her silver gown,
May Jones of Filbert Street is questing into town.

Eve in the garden, talking to the snake,
Spare a bite of apple core for your daughter's sake!
Caesar spare the men of Gaul, lest time's heart should break.
David king, be heedful what dark haired wives you take,
What proud sons and girls you get to pass your beauty down,
May Jones of Filbert Street is walking into town.

Proud queens, old queens, pale and dead and fair,
Who will be waiting to match her beauty there?
The night is nailed aloft with gold, the wind is on her hair;
And love is searching through her eyes; if time has love to spare
Bring love! Show love! Raise it like a crown!
May Jones of Filbert Street is walking into town.

Nations are marching. Cities yet unseen
Roar on the pavements where her feet have been:
New worlds, wise worlds, worlds all gold and green,
This is your birth night. Rain your splendors down!
May Jones of Filbert Street is walking into town.

Pull of the Ground.

PASSED by little houses,
Saw the empty chairs,
Looked through darkened windows
At old folk climbing stairs:

Creeping up by lamplight,
Urging weary bones
Twenty steps into the sky,
Above the sand and stones.

Earth, the jealous mother,
Bows the breasts of men,
Pleading, ever pleading,
"Heart come home again!"

Holding up her hidden
Hands that reach, and call
Down to wells of silence
Where no stars can fall.

Morality.

THE grass no record keeps of men,
It takes no lasting stain;
It chronicles slow histories
Of sun and summer rain.

From grief and squalor, silks and mirth,
Its bosom never winces,
It brushes any beggar's hair
As softly as a prince's:

Displays below man's bright charade
Laws older, more profound;
As green where Molly slept with Joe
As where a king was crowned.

Theology.

WHEN one perceives how roses,
Go prancing up a wall,
He marvels whose sobriety
So long delayed Man's fall,

How being cold and somber
Became the road to grace
When every sunny primrose
Wears passion on her face.

Once God conceived the goldfinch,
Once starred the April skies,
Once laughed the rivers down the hills
And dreamed a woman's eyes.

I doubt His heart is heavy,
I doubt His hair is grey,
It takes such store of argument
To spoil one summer day.

So if I held with churches
And miracles and sin,
There'd have to be a doorway
To let the dryads in,

There'd have to be a psalter
That spoke of cakes and wine,
And God behind the altar
Pleased with His own design.

Enchanted.

I MET a lady walking
In the dark last night,
When the shutters all were bowed
And the doors were tight;

Her hair was smoky thunder,
Oh and her lips were red
As if the very lamp of love
Were lit inside her head;

And tall and tall her song,
And bold and bold her tune;
Her eyes were black as starlings
In the winter of the moon.

I leaned my head. I marvelled
At the pity in her eyes.
"To kiss my lips," she whispered me,
"It makes men old and wise."

Her cheeks grew pale as blossoms.
I tore our lips apart

And welcomed her cold eyelids to
The summer of my heart.

My hands were on her shoulders.
I leaned again and said,
"The old and wise have memories.
Spare pity for the dead."

Hill Thoughts.

I

SO SOON I shall be less than stones
On which the sun looks down,
Soon feel no sun, no wind, no sleet,
No pain, no passion round my bones,
No press of blossoms at my feet;
So soon resign into your hand,
Oh brother Earth, what earth I wear,—
All dreams, all beauty, mirth and art,
This hungry, thirsting, God-like thing
So precious and so perishing
Has burnt into my heart.

Garments not ever worn by dust
And food not relished by the dead
Are mine upon this mountain head
Below the watches of the moon.
Climb up, oh soul, and pipe your tune,
Climb up above the gates, the bars,
The muffle of mortality,
Climb up and set your music free.

Oh huddle closer, stars.

II

O sun, young lover
Reach your arms to me,
And bid your daughter wind
Beat into me
And flutter me to gold.

Out of the blackness underneath my roots,
Out of the rocks, something that craves my fall.
Something the worms know asks me back again:
The silence calls me brother, and I listen.
My mother wants me home.

Oh sun young lover,
At whose hot kiss I came
Out of the sinless mold,
Maker of sin and shame,
Maker of wind and flame,
Reach down your passionate fingers,
Welcome me!

Let this black spell be broken,
Let not my resurrection be in vain,

My kiss of summer rain,
Till flowers have spoken
To the mad winds for me
And decked my racing leaves with gems and gold.

This Moment Eternal.

NOW, now, now!
Oh round word, blow your trumpet at the gates;
And sad Tomorrow,
And whispering Yesterday
Shall scuttle at your song.

A swallow falls all over
The blue pavement of the sky,
A swallow drunk with spring;
A rickety butterfly
With lip red wing
Tilts at the clover.
Dull things live long;
The road outlasts the rover.

Now, now, now!
Across the world I speed you. I broadcast you.
Let the skipping electrons dance you
Into the soul of every man alive.
In the long factories I sing you
Above the grind and rattle of great wheels,
The drone and swishing suck of rawhide belts.
Where the riveter pounds on the dolly bar I cry you;

Where the cable squeals around the nigger head;
Where over their tall boles
The black leaved elms of coal smoke take the wind.

The flowers dream that summer's all the year
And wonder why their blossom's not eternal:
To the twin flower and the violet
All time is vernal:
They feel no snow nor winter rain;
But you who know how soon this lace of day
Tears on the shoulders of the hills,—but you,
Divine and catching fever of the clay,
Which men call men, thrust not my gift away!

Now, now, now!
Where cordage whips in the storms of North Atlantic,
Where the bloom under the hammer sprays its sparks;
Where down the gantry the huge girder slithers
And settles like a tassel blown in the wind;
Where sharp nosed cranes gossip and pick and choose
Above Leviathan, I sing you there.

Spring and the summer green,
Blue skies, the fleck of cold,
The lift of music in a woman's eyes,
And the eternal spur of growing old.

Now, now, now!
Where hillside plows rattle Kentucky shale,
Where cows walk softly hunting roosting places;
In deadenings where the trees are ghosts of famine
And clouds are rain enough across the corn;
Out on Penobscot, I sing you,
When the fisherman draws his weirs,
Walking frail stilts above cold, morning seas,—
And the red sun dots his I, and the gulls cry hurry!

Now, now, now!
Where Broadway's flood breaks in a foam of faces
Below tall lady Woolworth's spangled hair:
In the quivering twilights, in the eyes of wonder
I hear a louder storm than wind or thunder
Reaching its echo to the dusty stars.

Now, now, now!
To use this day to the uttermost, to use
This flesh, this feeding earth;
Repay the intricate chemistry of my blood.
This dream to the uttermost, but not alone
Love, laughter, dreams, nor spiritual things,
Nor flesh alone, nor the sunset skies alone,
Nor the intake of eyes alone, but all together.
Out of the squawk and scream of earth's old blood,

Out of strange vanished stars that dipped their music
Into the ooze, when the other side of the moon,
With God knows what wrecked beauty on her face,
Looked down on ancient battle, I come to you.
I clutch today in my fingers. I, time's god,
The bold messiah of ten million years.
I at every instant immortal, eternal:
My feeling, thought, physical structure, bones
As now, and my emotions as now, forever;
Conscious eternally of this now and here;
Of all my nows and heres aware forever,
Of nothing else aware, here or hereafter;
Accepting reality, asking no better;
The complex intaker, struggling alone
To teach my dust the meaning of a man.
Now, my excuse, my need, the thing triumphant,
The bold creation, the song of songs for me.
No future of this state, nor any states,
No taller towers tomorrow, no better land.
This now the best for me.

A day, my lover!
A day to break a young man's heart
With hunger to be free.
In bright parade,
Trumpet and drums,

The red zouaves of morning march the hills.
The god comes! Come you also out to me
And taste the blood of summer.
Now, now, now,
Thrust up into the poplar tops
A steeple chime of song.
Make the lark amorous of divinities
And shame the mockingbird!

This day confounds old prayers.

August Morning.

THERE'S clover in the meadow yet
In spite of twenty cows
And honey in the primrose cup
Though forty hives carouse:

The clouds are off the hill top,
The roads are clean of rain;
And the youth my mother gave my bones
Thrills through my bones again.

LONESOME WATER

¶Set up in Linotype Caslon Old Face. Type arrangement by A. W. Rushmore. Manufactured by the Haddon Craftsmen for the publishers, HARPER & BROTHERS NEW YORK *and* LONDON

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